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SUBJECT: SUDAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT: KAMPALA-BASED DARFUR
REBELS ON RECONCILIATION

REF: SMALL-FITZGIBBON TELECON 05/18/07

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) faction tied to Ahmed Abdelshafi, based in Kampala, wants a reconciliation conference among the various SLM factions. Abdelshafi is expected back in Kampala in the next week. His faction claims to have assumed Abdelwahid El-Nur's leadership mantle. SLM-Abdelshafi has been contacted by San Egidio, which proposed a meeting in Rome of seven factions. Abdelshafi's group opposes San Egidio's plan because it disagrees on the factions that have been identified. Instead, SLM-Abdelshafi prefers a conference hosted by a different organization. Members of the faction are now in communication with Chadian-based SLM elements and with Sudanese Senior Special Assistant to the President Minni Minnawi. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) At the request of the Sudan Program Group, on May 19, P/E Chief met with eight members of Ahmed Abdelshafi's faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) based in Kampala. Beginning in November 2006, Abdelshafi and members of his group relocated from Asmara, Eritrea. Some of the others in Kampala include: Abakar Abubashar, who chaired the Wealth-sharing Commission at the Abuja Peace Talks, Nouri Abdullah (one of two Canadians who had advised SLM leader Abdelwahid El-Nur), Mustafa Eisa, Ahmed Siraj, and Karuke Ismail Suleiman. Abdelshafi, currently in Jebel Marra, told P/E Chief he would return to Kampala within a week. Abdelshafi is a Ugandan passport holder. The group is staying at the Millennium Hotel, owned by Ugandan Minister of State for Labor Mwesigwa Rukuntana. The Ugandan Government is aware of the presence of the SLM faction in Kampala and has made contact with its members.

¶3. (SBU) The SLM-Abdelshafi faction initially believed that the holding of a field commanders' conference would be the first step in unifying the movement. The conference failed to take off for a number of reasons. According to Abakar Abubashar and Nouri Abdullah, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) meddling and Government attacks on SLM had made it difficult to bring the military commanders together. In the absence of a field commanders' conference, Abdelshafi's faction said the next best alternative was to have a meeting of the various political players within the SLM. Abdelshafi proposed a leadership structure be developed to focus the various faction leaders' attention on making the SLM a viable institution that was not based on personalities and personal allegiances. The participation of key military commanders may be needed at some point, but most factions were reluctant to pull their commanders out of the field for fear of a Government attack. After creating a unified structure, Abubashar said that discussion of the "outstanding issues" on the Darfur Peace Agreement could be addressed. He stated the key issue for Abdelshafi is more representation and powers for the Darfur region. Compensation issues could be worked out, but would need to be better explained to the Darfurian population.

¶4. (SBU) San Egidio had contacted the group last week regarding the possibility of holding a conference of the various SLM factions in Rome. Abubashar and Abdullah took exception to San Egidio's analysis that there were seven SLM factions that needed to be reconciled, complaining that some of the "factions" consisted of only one or two persons. SLM-Abdelshafi members see three factions that need to be brought together: Chad-based and funded Khamis Abudulla's group which includes Adam Shogar, Adam Bahkit, and Sharif Harir; Ahmed Abdelshafi, who claims control of 65 percent of the field commanders; and Abdelwahid El-Nur, who is in France. Abdelshafi's group described Abdelwahid's group as a three-person operation: Abdelwahid, Abdullah Ahmed-Deen, and Jafar Munro, his spokesman. Abubashar said that Abdelwahid commands little or no authority within SLM but he would need to be included, but not as SLM's leader.

¶5. (SBU) Abdelshafi's group also had been contacted by Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM) about the possibility of a reconciliation conference in Juba. The group still has strong contacts with SPLM members, largely a carry-over from its close relationship with Dr. John Garang. However, Abdullah said that the SPLM cannot be completely trusted after the hard line the SPLM's members of the Government of Sudan's delegation took at the Abuja Peace Talks. Abdelshafi's groups would go to Juba if there were no other alternatives.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: P/E Chief put the Abdelshafi faction in touch with members of Khamis Abdulla's group in N'Djamena. It had been almost a year since the rank-and-file members of the various factions had spoken with each other. They now have exchanged telephone numbers and promised regular contact.

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P/E Chief also put Abubashar and Abdullah on the telephone with Senior Special Advisor Minni Minnawi. Minni appeared genuinely happy to hear from them and they discussed Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA)-related issues for about fifteen minutes. P/E Chief encouraged Abdelshafi's group to put its positions on outstanding DPA issues in writing.
CHRITTON